

# **By-Mail Voting – Issue Overview**

## **For the Government Operations Interim Committee**

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Utah Clerk's Legislative Policy Committee -- June 19, 2019

In the upcoming 2020 Election cycle, every county in Utah will be mailing ballots to active registered voters. Over the past decade, Utah has been evolving to "Vote by Mail Hybrid" or "Voter's Choice" system in a gradual, yet piecemeal fashion. During this time, state statute has been modified with a number of "band aid" fixes and adjustments, but now that all 29 counties have successfully evolved to the Voter's Choice approach, it is time to conduct a comprehensive review of the governing statutes to ensure consistency across the state.

The general idea that we suggest be the starting point for this review is based upon four foundational principles:

- 1) All active voters will be mailed a ballot prior to each election in which they are eligible to vote.
- 2) Voters may request that their ballot be sent to an alternate (or mailing) address that is different than the address at which they are registered to vote.
- 3) In-person Early Voting options will be provided in each county.
- 4) Election Day polling places or vote centers will be provided in each jurisdiction, and will be open to any eligible voter.

With these four principles in mind, Part 3 of 20A-3 needs to be reviewed and revised to reflect these four principles, to remove unnecessary "Absentee" terminology, and to simplify the statute under the premise that all elections offer every voter the choice to vote by mail, by drop box, or in person at early vote or election day voting locations.

# By-Mail Voting – Talking Points

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### **Benefits of Utah's "Voter's Choice" election system: more informed voters, more voters, more options**

A 2016 Weber State University statistical survey of 1,600 voters found that:

- 79% of voters felt that receiving their ballot in the mail made them more informed voters
- By a 2 to 1 margin, voters said they would rather mail their ballot or drop it in a drop box than vote at a polling place
- 70% of voters supported the decision to move to Voter's Choice

In 2014, Utah ranked a dismal 44<sup>th</sup> in the nation in voter turnout. In 2018, Utah's rank increased to 23<sup>rd</sup> in the nation, the highest percentage increase in the nation in voter turnout over 2014. Several factors contributed to this (competitive Congressional race, statewide propositions), but another big factor was that 98% of all voters received their ballot in the mail. (America Goes to the Polls - <https://www.nonprofitvote.org/america-goes-to-the-polls-2018>)

A Pantheon Analytics study of Utah's 2016 elections showed that turnout was 10% higher in Voter's Choice counties than counties that did not mail all voters a ballot.

(<https://www.voteathome.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Utah-2016-Downballot-Analysis-FINAL-Pantheon-Analytics.pdf>)

In the 2018 midterms, 69% of total votes cast in the Western U.S. were either mailed or returned via drop boxes. (<https://www.people-press.org/2018/12/17/most-voters-have-positive-views-of-their-midterm-voting-experiences/>)